

Approach A Cage-Bound Pet Bird

Use these tips to get your pet bird out of the cage and on to its playgym or stand.

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Benevolent Approach

Dealing with a frightened parrot requires exquisite patience and a calm personality. The human needs to begin with a point of reference where the bird is already comfortable. With the cage-bound bird, this starts with establishing a positive relationship through the cage bars.

A parrot that is trained to step courteously onto something other than a hand (such as a hand-held perch) can easily be moved from one place to another whenever its body language indicates the potential for aggression.

Many parrots seem to enjoy the non-confrontational company of a human sitting by the cage and reading aloud. Do not make direct eye contact with the parrot at this time, only look up briefly out of the corner of the eye, then look down again.

After a few days (or weeks) of this non-confrontational approach, the bird might be ready for more contact. Hold up a special treat in your fingers, and drop it in the food cup through the cage bars. Once the bird learns that nice things happen when your fingers approach, the next step is to offer the treat from your fingertips. All this is done through the safety of the cage bars, with lavish verbal rewards as well.

The next goal is to get the bird more comfortable with the bird cage door being open. Once the bird is relaxed with the movement of your fingers to receive a treat, offer the treat at the open doorway. After that, the parrot might gradually allow you to slowly move your hand (with food treat) inside the cage. Once that is achieved without panic, very gradually try to get the bird to allow you to briefly touch its feet. Take your time, and don't force the issue or you could set things back several weeks.

The bird seeks the safety of its bird cage above all, so always make the return to the bird cage the ultimate reward. When you finally (weeks later) reach the stage of stepping the bird onto your hand inside the bird cage, only do this for a second before stepping the bird back down to its perch. Once this is accomplished, you can very slowly, very gradually start teaching the bird to stay on your hand as you move the bird out of the bird cage while perched on your hand.

The point is to gradually teach the bird that nothing bad happens when it is with you, despite it leaving the safety of its bird cage. Never force the issue. Always observe the parrot's body language for clues to your next step. If the bird begins to look frightened, immediately back off, allow the animal to relax; then begin again.

Ever so gently nudge at the envelope but never push the bird too far or too fast. After all, you have years to enjoy together, so a few weeks either way will not matter in the end. What does matter is that the bird learns that you respect its feelings and are willing to take the time to earn its trust.

Understanding Cage-Bound Bird Behaviors

Learn more about why a companion parrot shows cage-bound behavior. [More>>](#)

The Territorial Parrot

A lovely way to step around confrontations with companion parrots is to perch train them. A parrot that is trained to step courteously onto something other than a hand (such as a hand-held perch, basket, baking dish, crock, whatever) can easily be moved from one place to another whenever its body language indicates the potential for aggression. This allows humans to, for example, easily remove a territorially aggressive parrot from its cage and place it safely on a play gym, enabling the human to service the bird's cage without danger of attack. A lovely way to avoid conflict!

If your parrot decides to up the ante by heading along the perch toward your hand in an aggressive manner, you can easily block its advance. First, make sure the free end of the perch is higher than the hand-held end, as birds tend to go up instead of down. Second, have something in your other hand to block the bird's approach. This can be anything from a nailbrush to a small stuffed animal, it matters not. It only needs to be something the bird is not used to seeing in your hand, and it is only used as a distraction while you move the bird to step down on a different roost.

An alternative to perch training is training a parrot to politely come out of its bird cage onto a T-stand. Most parrots have certain morsels they adore, which are easily identified as the thing they always eat first when offered their food bowl. As

long as owners do not make the mistake of offering these prizes so freely that they lose value, they can be extremely useful when the need arises to offer a special treat as reward for polite behavior.

For example, when dealing with an aggressively territorial parrot, an owner can teach the bird to come out of its bird cage onto a T-stand to receive a luscious treat that can be earned no other way. Place the T-stand next to the open cage door, and let the bird see you drop the treat in the food cup at the far end, then move away. Do this repeatedly over a period of several days, until the parrot is climbing out comfortably.

Then discontinue placing the treat in the food cup, and gradually approach the bird while it is sitting on the T-stand, letting it see that luscious treat in your hand. When the bird remains on the T-stand at your approach, hand it the treat, or drop the treat in the T-stand's food cup. Once your parrot is comfortable with this, slowly pick up the T-stand with parrot on it, and carry it out of sight of the bird cage.